

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 CAPE TOWN 1128

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PBIO, SF
SUBJECT: THE LEADERSHIP STRUGGLE IN THE NATIONAL PARTY

1. SUMMARY: IN ANTICIPATION OF A NEW CONSTITUTION AND
VORSTER'S POSSIBLE ASCENSION TO AN EXECUTIVE STATE PRESIDENCY
IN 1980, THE LEADERSHIP STRUGGLE IN THE NATIONALIST PARTY
HAS HEATED UP. THE ISSUE OF SCANDALS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF
INFORMATION HAS DAMAGED AT LEAST TEMPORARILY CONNIE MULDER'S
POSITION AS HEIR APPARENT. MULDER'S MAIN RIVAL FOR THE
PREMIERSHIP, DEFENSE MINISTER P.W. BOTHA, IS WIDELY BELIEVED
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TO BE TOO MERCURIAL FOR THE TOP JOB. FOREIGN MINISTER
PIK BOTHA'S STRONG SUPPORT AMONG BOTH THE WHITE ELECTORATE
AND THE PRESS, HIS POPULAR TOUGH INTERNATIONAL PERFORMANCE
OVER THE LAST YEAR AND HIS STANDING WITH PRIME MINISTER
VORSTER, HAVE MADE HIM A SERIOUS CONTENDER. THE EVENTUAL
OUTCOME OF EVENTS IN NAMIBIA WILL INFLUENCE PIK'S PROSPECTS.
MINISTER OF LABOR FANIE BOTHA, BECAUSE OF HIS SENIORITY AND LACK

OF ENEMIES, IS CONSIDERED BY MANY TO BE A MORE PROMISING DARK HORSE CANDIDATE THAN THE FOREIGN MINISTER. VORSTER WILL HAVE AN IMPORTANT, ALTHOUGH NOT NECESSARILY DECISIVE, IMPACT IN DETERMINING HIS SUCCESSOR. MEANWHILE, THE POWER STRUGGLE NOW TENDS TO IMPINGE ON MOST POLICY ISSUES. END SUMMARY.

2. WHILE THERE IS NO TARGET DATE FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW PROPOSED SOUTH AFRICAN CONSTITUTION, MANY OBSERVERS BELIEVE IT WILL BE INTRODUCED AT THE NEXT PARLIAMENT AND GO INTO EFFECT IN 1980. VORSTER, IT IS WIDELY THOUGHT, HAVING COMPLETED HIS "LUCKY 13TH" YEAR AS PRIME MINISTER, WILL MOVE UP TO THE NEW EXECUTIVE STATE PRESIDENT POSITION. A FEW OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT HE IS FADING PHYSICALLY AND MAY RETIRE ALTOGETHER AT THE END OF NEXT YEAR. IN ANY EVENT, THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE NATIONALIST PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS MAY BE ASKED TO NAME A NEW PM SOMETIME IN 1979 HAS HEATED UP THE LEADERSHIP STRUGGLE.

3. FOR SOME TIME CONNIE MULDER HAS BEEN CONSIDERED THE HEIR APPARENT TO VORSTER, A POSITION THAT STEMMED PRIMARILY FROM HIS POSITION AS PARTY LEADER IN THE TRANSVAAL, THE LARGEST PROVINCE AND HOME OF HALF OF THE NP MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT. ALTHOUGH THERE HAVE BEEN PERSISTENT RUMORS THAT VORSTER HAS NOT BEEN NOT PLEASED WITH MULDER, HE WAS STILL SEEN AS ON THE ASCENDANCY AS RECENTLY AS JANUARY, WHEN HE TOOK OVER THE PLURAL AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO AND RETAINED INFORMATION AS WELL. CONFIDENTIAL

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MULDER'S EFFORT IN THE LAST FEW MONTHS TO PUT A MORE BENEVOLENT FACE ON GOVERNMENT RACIAL POLICIES WITHOUT ALTERING THE BASIC OBJECTIVE OF SEPARATE DEVELOPMENT HAS WON HIM PRAISE FROM NATIONALISTS OF ALL POINTS OF VIEW AND INCREASED HIS STATURE. IT WAS GENERALLY ASSUMED WHEN MULDER TOOK OVER PLURAL AFFAIRS THAT IF HE COULD SUCCESSFULLY ADMINISTER THIS DELICATE AND IMPORTANT PORTFOLIO, IT WOULD CONFIRM HIS STANDING AS FRONT-RUNNER TO REPLACE VORSTER.

4. THE BURGEONING DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION SCANDALS, HOWEVER, WHICH BECAME HEADLINE NEWS IN APRIL, HAVE DIMINISHED MULDER'S PROSPECTS (CAPE TOWN 935 AND PREVIOUS). ALTHOUGH THERE HAS NOT YET BEEN ANY PROOF OF MULDER'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE ALLEGED MISUSE OF FUNDS, BECAUSE THE TROUBLE OCCURRED IN A DEPARTMENT UNDER HIS CONTROL AND CENTERED ON HIS PERSONAL CHOICE AS SECRETARY OF THE DEPARTMENT, ESCHER RHOODIE, IT HAS DAMAGED HIS REPUTATION. MEANWHILE, RUMORS OF HORRENDOUS WRONG-DOING INVOLVING MULDER ARE WIDE-SPREAD IN PRESS CIRCLES BUT REMAIN UNSUBSTANTIATED. THE ENGLISH PRESS AND THE OPPOSITION HAVE DEMANDED MULDER'S RESIGNATION, WHILE MUCH OF THE AFRIKAANS PRESS-- PARTICULARLY PAPERS IN THE NATIONALE PERS CHAIN, WHICH ARE LINKED TO P.W. BOTHA--HAVE SEVERELY CRITICIZED ACTIVITIES

IN MULDER'S DEPARTMENT.

5. WHILE VORSTER'S INTERVENTION ON MAY 8 AND MULDER'S REPLIES TO PARLIAMENT THE NEXT DAY DAMPENED THE CRISIS (CAPE TOWN 935), THE STORY IS BY NO MEANS OVER. SOME OBSERVERS SAY THAT MULDER SUPPORTERS WANTED VORSTER TO APPOINT A JUDICIAL COMMISSION TO INQUIRE INTO THE CONDUCT OF THE INFORMATION DEPARTMENT, AN ACTION WHICH WOULD HAVE CLOSED OFF PUBLIC DEBATE ON THE MATTER AND CURTAILED PRESS REVELATIONS. INSTEAD, VORSTER ANNOUNCED HE HAD APPOINTED AN UNNAMED INVESTIGATOR, A PROCEDURE WHICH IMPLIES THAT THERE MAY BE MORE TO UNCOVER AND WHICH LEAVES THE PRESS FREE TO DIG UP MORE NUGGETS. WHATEVER THE OUTCOME OF THE INVESTIGATION, MULDER'S COMMITMENT TO DISBAND AND REORGANIZE THE DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION
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(CAPE TOWN 892) MAY RESULT IN THE REMOVAL OF ONE OF THE BASES OF HIS POWER AND INFLUENCE.

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT PARA 9. AND 10.)

6. THE OTHER TRADITIONAL FRONT-RUNNER FOR THE SUCCESSION HAS BEEN P.W. BOTHA, MINISTER OF DEFENSE AND DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER. BOTHA IS NOT PARTICULARLY POPULAR IN PARTY RANKS OUTSIDE THE CAPE AND HAS A REPUTATION AS A MERCURIAL MINISTER. NEVERTHELESS, HE IS AN ASTUTE POLITICIAN AND HE MAINTAINS A FORMIDABLE POWER BASE AS LEADER OF THE NP IN THE CAPE. BOTHA IS REGARDED AS AMBITIOUS AND SOME BELIEVE THAT HE WILL PUT UP A STRONG FIGHT FOR THE PARTY LEADERSHIP. OTHER OBSERVERS SPECULATE
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THAT P.W. ACCEPTS THAT HIS OWN CHANCES FOR POWER ARE SLIM AND WILL ESSENTIALLY TRY TO PLAY THE ROLE OF "KINGMAKER."

7. THE NEWEST CONTENDER IN THE LEADERSHIP STAKES IS PIK BOTHA, MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, WHO DESPITE HAVING BEEN IN THE CABINET ONLY A YEAR IS WIDELY CONSIDERED THE ODDS-ON FAVORITE AMONG THE WHITE POPULATION. THE CHOICE, HOWEVER, IS NOT BY POPULAR REFERENDUM AND BOTHA AT THIS STAGE LACKS A STRONG PARTY BASE. ALTHOUGH POPULAR WITH VERLIGTES, BOTHA'S PRESENT STRENGTH WITHIN THE CAUCUS IS BELIEVED TO BE SMALL. ONE OF PIK BOTHA'S AIDES, WHEN ASKED PRIVATELY FOR AN ESTIMATE OF THE MINISTER'S PERSONAL SUPPORTERS IN THE CAUCUS, REPLIED, "WE RECENTLY DID THIS EXERCISE BUT HAD TROUBLE COMING UP WITH 18." (THE AIDE SMILINGLY NOTED THAT 18 WAS THE NUMBER REQUIRED TO TAKE OVER AS OFFICIAL PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION FROM THE PFP.) PIK ALSO SUFFERS FROM HIS REPORTEDLY ANTAGONISTIC RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DEFENSE MINISTER, WHICH RESULTS IN PART FROM SHARP DISAGREEMENTS ON POLICY. ACCORDING TO PFP LEADER COLIN EGLIN, PIK CLAIMS PRIVATELY THAT AS SAG AMBASSADOR TO WASHINGTON IN 1975, HE WARNED AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA' MOVE INTO ANGOLA--AN OPERATION P.W. PUSHED AND DIRECTED. BOTHA'S "TOUGH" NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE WESTERN POWERS ON THE NAMIBIAN ISSUE HAS BOOSTED HIS POPULAR IMAGE; IF A STABLE AND PEACEFUL SOLUTION EMERGES IN THE TERRITORY, OR IF ONLY THE SAG AVOIDS SANCTIONS, HIS POPULARITY WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR THE CAUCUS TO SPURN.

8. A MAJOR FACTOR IN A PIK BOTHA LEADERSHIP BID NEXT YEAR IS THE EXTENT OF BACKING HE RECEIVES FROM VORSTER.
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WHILE BOTHA IS CONSIDERED VORSTER'S PROTEGE AND ENJOYS HIS SUPPORT IN MATTERS RELATED TO FOREIGN AFFAIRS, IT IS UNCERTAIN WHETHER THIS SUPPORT WILL EXTEND TO PARTY LEADERSHIP. VORSTER WILL HAVE AN IMPORTANT, ALTHOUGH NOT NECESSARILY DECISIVE, INFLUENCE IN THE SELECTION OF HIS SUCCESSOR, BUT HE MAY DECIDE TO AVOID ANTAGONIZING VARIOUS FACTIONS AND ADOPT A NEUTRAL STANCE.

9. THE OTHER "DARK HORSE" IS S. P. (FANIE) BOTHA, MINISTER OF LABOR AND MINES, A SOLID, MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD PARTY MAN. S.P. IS A DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE TRANSVAAL PARTY BRANCH AND PRESUMABLY WOULD HAVE A LEG-UP WITH THE DOMINANT PROVINCIAL GROUP SHOULD MULDER FADE. BOTHA HAS RECEIVED CONSIDERABLE PRAISE FOR HIS HANDLING OF LABOR MATTERS AND OF PREVIOUS PORTFOLIOS. HE MAY SOON RECEIVE MORE FAVORABLE PUBLICITY AS A RESULT OF ANTICIPATED REFORMS IN LABOR LEGISLATION, ALTHOUGH HE COULD POSSIBLY FACE A BACKLASH AMONG SOME WHITE WORKERS SUCH AS THOSE IN THE MINERS' UNION. S.P. IS A RELATIVELY UNEXCITING PERSONALITY, BUT HE IS A MORE SENIOR MINISTER THAN PIK BOTHA AND IS RESPECTED BY PARTY SUPPORTERS OF ALL POINTS OF VIEW. HIS MAIN ASSET MAY BE A RELATIVE LACK OF ENEMIES.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

10. IF VORSTER ASCENDS TO THE POSITION OF STATE PRESIDENT, THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP WILL DEPEND UPON HOW THE PROPOSED JOINT CABINET COUNCIL OF WHITES, COLOREDS AND INDIANS WILL WORK IN PRACTICE. IF IT TURNS OUT TO BE ONLY A "TALK SHOP," THE WHITE PRIME MINISTER WILL ESSENTIALLY CONTINUE TO BE IN CHARGE OF RUNNING THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT. WHETHER IN THIS CASE VORSTER WOULD BE INTERESTED IN ASSUMING A TITULAR PRESIDENCY IS PROBLEMATIC. IF, ON THE OTHER HAND, THE JOINT CABINET COUNCIL SHARES THE
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NATIONAL PORTFOLIOS AND IN EFFECT ACTS AS A NATIONAL CABINET, THE WHITE PRIME MINISTER WOULD DEAL ONLY WITH "LOCAL" MATTERS AFFECTING THE WHITE POPULATION SUCH AS HEALTH AND EDUCATION. IN THIS CASE, THE STATE PRESIDENT WOULD IN EFFECT BE THE LEADER

OF THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT AND THE WHITE PRIME MINSTERSHIP
WOULD NOT BE SUCH A COVETED POST. A THIRD AND PERHAPS THE
MOST LIKELY ALTERNATIVE IS THAT THE FORMER SCENARIO
WILL BE IMPLEMENTED WITH A PROMISE OF EVOLUTION INTO THE
LATTER.

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11. THE HEATING UP OF THE POWER STRUGGLE WITHIN THE
LEADERSHIP HAS ENERGIZED POLITICKING WITHIN THE CAUCUS
AND IMPINGED ON MOST POLICY ISSUES. WITH A CLOUD
CURRENTLY HANGING OVER MULDER, SOME MP'S FROM THE TRANSVAAL
ARE REPORTEDLY EXAMINING THEIR POSITIONS WITH AN EYE
TO GETTING ON A PROMISING BANDWAGON IN ITS EARLY STAGES.
RECENTLY RUMORS CIRCULATED IN PARLIAMENT ALLEGING PIK
BOTH A INTENDED TO CHALLENGE MOULDER FOR LEADERSHIP OF
THE TRANSVAAL BRANCH AT THE PROVINCIAL CONGRESS THIS
FALL. A CONFIDANT OF BOTH A' SAID PRIVATELY THAT THIS
RUMOR HAD STIRRED UP ANIMOSITY AGAINST PIK, AND HE DENIED

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THAT THE MINSTER WOULD BE IN A POSITION TO MAKE SUCH A CHALLENGE.

12. THE STRUGGLE HAS APPARENTLY INFLUENCED CABINET CONSIDERATION OF THE NAMIBIA ISSUE OVER THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS. IN THE END, PIK BOTHA PROMOTED ACCEPTANCE OF THE PROPOSAL BUT HE TOOK PAINS THROUGHOUT THE NEGOTIATIONS TO APPEAR TOUGH. HIS WALKOUT FROM THE NEW YORK PROXIMITY TALKS IN FEBRUARY WAS VERY LIKELY IN LARGE PART STAGED FOR DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION. P.W. BOTHA APPARENTLY OPPOSED THE WESTERN PLAN, PARTIALLY OUT OF CONVICTION AND PARTIALLY PERHAPS TO SET UP THE FOREIGN MINISTER FOR A FALL SHOULD DEVELOPMENTS GO SOUR. THE DEFENSE MINISTER ALSO PRESUMABLY MASTER-MINDED THE MAY 4 CASSINGA RAID WHICH HAS SET BACK HOPES FOR EARLY IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WESTERN PROPOSAL. AN EDITOR OF A NATIONAL PARTY ORGAN CONFIRMED TO US RECENTLY THAT THERE HAD BEEN A SERIOUS SPLIT IN THE CABINET OVER THE MILITARY PLAN. NEVERTHELESS, ALL THE LEADING ACTORS TOOK PAINS TO COVER THEMSELVES FROM CRITICISM FROM THE RIGHT. ALTHOUGH PIK MAY HAVE OBJECTED TO THE SCALE OF THE RAID, WE HAVE REPORTS HE WAS AT THE GROOTFONTEIN MILITARY BASE ON MAY 4 TO SEND OFF THE TROOPS (DAO IR 6 880 0216 78 DTG 151025Z MAY 78). INTERESTINGLY, MULDER'S POSITION ON THE WESTERN PROPOSAL, ACCORDING TO SEVERAL SOURCES, WAS NONCOMMITTAL. ONE JOURNALIST, HOWEVER, MAINTAINS THAT PRO-MULDER MP S WERE BEHIND THE SCENES CRITICISING PIK'S HANDLING OF THE NEOGITATIONS.

13. ON THE ISSUE OF SAG-US RELATIONS, THE FOREIGN MINISTER HAS ALSO BEEN IN THE FOREFRONT OF GOVERNMENT LEADERS SCOURGING THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION FOR "MEDDLING" IN SOUTH AFRICA'S AFFAIRS AND FOR ALLEGED APPEASEMENT OF COMMUNIST INTERVENTION IN AFRICA. RECENTLY, MULDER HAS ALSO SEEMED

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TO STEP UP HIS VERBAL ASSAULTS ON THE WEST.

14. ON DOMESTIC ISSUES, MULDER AND S. P. BOTHA HAVE THE SPOTLIGHT. THEIR TASK IN TERMS OF THE POLITICAL STRUGGLE IS TO DEMONSTRATE TO THE VERLIGTES REFORMIST IMAGES AND TO THE VERKRAMPTE THAT BASIC NATIONALIST POLICY IS BEING SERVED BY THE CHANGES THAT THEY ARE SEPARATELY PROMOTING. A FUNDAMENTAL CONSIDERATION IN THE LEADERSHIP DYNAMICS IS THAT THE CAUCUS IS STILL

OVERWHELMINGLY CONSERVATIVE. THUS PIK BOTHA HAS AVOIDED ANY VERLIGTE SOUNDS SINCE BEFORE THE NATIONAL ELECTIONS LAST YEAR WHEN HE WAS PUBLICLY QUOTED AS ENDORSING REPEAL OF THE MIXED MARRIAGES ACT.

15. THE SELECTION OF A SUCCESSOR PRIME MINISTER IS AT THE LEAST 15 OR 18 MONTHS AWAY. MANY POLITICAL OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT MULDER IS STILL IN FRONT ALTHOUGH HIS LEAD IS FADING. IT IS FAR TOO EARLY OF COURSE TO MAKE ANY PREDICTIONS. MUCH WILL DEPEND ON THE COURSE OF SOUTH AFRICA'S INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OVER THIS PERIOD, THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY, THE DEGREE OF DOMESTIC TRANQUILITY, AND ANY FURTHER REVELATIONS IN THE INFORMATION DEPARTMENT SCANDALS.
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